

Could the side-gig economy save SA?

By  Nontokoze Madonsela

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Lacklustre economic growth over the past decade has seen many companies forgo bonuses and salary increases. As a result of Covid-19, we are now experiencing wide-spread unemployment and salary cuts, this while the cost of living goes up. It should come as no surprise that South Africa has a youth unemployment rate estimated at a staggering 55.75%, according to the Statista 2020 figures.



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This phenomenon has exploded over the years, and fortunately employers have become more accepting of the side gig. A recent study on the side hustle economy by Henley Business School in South Africa shows that 30% of respondents have a side hustle, working outside of the “9 to 5 grind” (another term I inherited from my son!).

The ever-increasing dependency on technology and the introduction of new social platforms have given rise to a wide range of new career opportunities, some of which were never catered for, or even previously imagined, in the formal job market.

These lucrative opportunities service both consumers directly as well as established reputable organisations. When I first entered the job market, I had one of five possible “reputable” career choices; a teacher, a lawyer, an accountant, a doctor or a nurse. In today’s ever-changing world, we see a crop of new job titles and roles pop up almost every day, born of the fourth industrial revolution and the hustle economy.

However, if we allow our limited experiences and the inability to imagine anything outside of our scope of reference, we will not only limit the growth of potentially vital sectors in our economy, but we will also limit the potential of the people closest to us: our children. If there's one thing I can assure you, Sergey Brin's mother was not sitting with her friends saying that her son is going to become an internet entrepreneur who will own a \$49.1bn company employing over 100,000 people globally. But, here we are!

Acknowledging, supporting and harnessing the spirit of hustling in our own homes is critical. Sometimes it needs to happen in things that one may not be familiar with. We are now seeing more and more of these previously non-existent roles and titles become the cornerstone of lucrative multi-million dollar companies. Did someone say Facebook?

It started with a Hustle...

The word "hustle" dates back to as early as the 1600s, from the Dutch word "Husseln" meaning "to shake or toss". Throughout the years, the word has taken on many meanings. In more recent history, "hustler" was used to describe individuals that engaged in dubious ways of making a living. These included the likes of Frank Lucas – the protagonist that the movie "American Gangster" was based upon – an American drug trafficker who operated in Harlem during the late 1960s and early 1970s; as well as some of the most renowned pool swindlers, like the infamous Titanic Thompson and Rudolf "Minnesota Fats" Wanderone.

In modern times, the label has seen somewhat of an evolution, with a far more aspirational spin. This new take on a word previously loaded with negative connotation has become clear in everything from pop music (thanks, in large part, to our reigning King and Queen of hip hop, Jay-Z and Beyoncé) to business literature, with titles such as *Hustle: The Power to Change your Life with Money, Meaning and Momentum*. Hustle has officially made its debut into global economic lexicon, broadly representing the emerging "gig economy".

Can't knock the hustle

For me personally, to "hustle" means to continuously be on the lookout for new opportunities, rather than waiting for them to come to me. This requires tapping into available resources and working hard to accomplish what I had set out to achieve.

With no big budget for advertising campaigns or elaborate (and expensive) distribution channels, the success of the South African hustler is often reliant on the support of their communities.

With high levels of unemployment, particularly among South Africa's youth, I believe that it is incumbent on not only government, but community members to support young hustlers by reducing barriers to entrepreneurship. While the role of corporate South Africa is to support, facilitate and create these opportunities as a viable path to job creation and future economic growth, it is also the responsibility of each individual to create opportunities for themselves.

Metropolitan recently invited aspiring hustlers to join in on our #WeStart2021 Webinars; a platform that aimed to equip them with the tools and knowledge they might need to take their 'hustling' to the next level. This was an idea borne from recognising the importance of supporting young entrepreneurs - and who better to provide guidance than those who have

been able to turn their hustles into budding businesses?

As the pandemic's trajectory continues to evolve, so too will the hustle of many South Africans who are trying to maintain their livelihoods, while chasing their dreams and goals. It is no secret that small businesses often fail to get off the ground, which means we all need to play our part in supporting our fellow hustlers, giving them the best possible chance at success. Key to one growing and improving on one's hustle, is the need to tap into existing networks around them, this could be in the form of community members, friends, family and sometimes even strangers. Through seizing the power of the collective – and by providing the right support and guidance – the hustle economy may just be what we need to start repairing the tears in the socio-economic fabric of South Africa.

Everyday I'm Hustling

At first when I thought of hustling, I couldn't help but imagine a suspicious looking character standing on the street corner selling "off-the-lorry" merchandise. And while my understanding has since changed dramatically, one thing remains the same: while they may not be literally standing on the corner, they are in our streets and in our communities. These hustlers are people we know. Most often, they offer a service that is needed in the very community in which they reside, making it even more important for us to support them. It's not only their success that hinges in our support, but that of our communities.

While the Oxford Dictionary might still define a Hustler as "a person adept at aggressive selling or illicit dealing", irrespective of your position in the hustler spectrum, one cannot ignore their tenacity in identifying opportunity, their relentless entrepreneurial spirit and determination to succeed against all odds.

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